

15 Words 15c



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By
Earl
Derr
Bigger

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(Continued)

Once more Paddock started his faithful engine, and, hallooing madly, the three set out in pursuit. Not yet had the Lilith struck its gait, and in fifteen minutes they were alongside. Martin Wall, beholding them from the deck, had a rather unexpected attack of pity and stopped his engines. The three limp watchers were taken aboard. "What does this mean?" "Chatterbox Minot."

"You poor devil!" said Martin Wall. "Come and have a drink. Mean?" He



"She's steaming out to sea!"

paused. "It means that the only way I could get rid of our friend Trimmer was to set out for New York."

"For New York?" cried Minot, standing glass in hand.

"Yes. Came on board, Trimmer did, searched the boat and then declared I'd shipped George away until his visit should be over. So he and his friends—one of them the chief of police, by the way—sat down to wait for your return. Gail! I thought of you out in that rain—sat and sat and sat. What could I do?"

"To Trimmer, the brute!" said Paddock, raising his glass.

"Finally I had an idea. I had the boys pull up anchor and start the engines. Trimmer wanted to know the answer. 'Leaving for New York tonight,' I said. 'Want to come along?' He wasn't sure whether he would go or not, but his friends were sure they wouldn't. Put up an awful howl, and just before we got under way Mr. Trimmer and party crawled into their rowboat and splashed back to San Marco."

"Well, what now?" asked Minot.

"I've made up my mind," said Wall. "Been intending to go back north for some time, and now that I've started I guess I'll keep on going."

"Splendid," cried Minot. "And you'll take Mr. George Harrowby with you?"

Mr. Wall seemed in excellent spirits. He slapped Minot on the back.

"If you say so, of course. Don't know exactly what they can do to us, but I think George needs the sea air. How about it, your lordship?"

Poor old George, drooping as he had never drooped before, looked wearily into Wall's eyes.

"What's the use?" he said. "Fight's all gone out of me. Losing interest in what's next. Three hours on that blooming ocean with the rain soaking in—I'm going to bed. I don't care what becomes of me."

And he slumped away to his cabin.

"Well, boys, I'm afraid we'll have to put you off," said Martin Wall. "Glad to have met both of you. Some time in New York we may run into each other again."

He shook hands genially, and the two young men dropped once more into that unhappy launch. As they sped toward the shore the Lilith, behind them, was heading for the open sea.

"Sorry if I've seemed to have a grouchy tonight," said Paddock as they walked up the deserted avenue toward the hotel. "But these Florida rain storms aren't the pleasantest things to wear next to one's skin. I apologize, Dick."

"Nonsense," Minot answered. "Old Job himself would have frowned a bit if he'd been through what you have tonight. It was my fault for getting you into it."

"Forget it," Paddock said. "Well, it looks like a wedding, old man. The letters home again and George Harrowby headed for New York—a three days' trip. Nothing to hinder now. Have you thought of that?"

"I don't want to think," said Minot

gloomily. "Good night, old man." Paddock sped up the stairs to his room, which was on the second floor, and Minot turned toward the elevator. At that moment he saw approaching him through the deserted lobby Mr. Jim O'Malley, the house detective of the De la Paz.

"Can we see you a minute in the office, Mr. Minot?" he asked.

"Certainly," Minot answered. "But I'm soaked through—was out in all that rain!"

"Too bad," said O'Malley, with a sympathetic glance. "We won't keep you but a minute."

He led the way, and, wondering, Minot followed. In the tiny office of the hotel manager a bullet headed man stood waiting.

"My friend, Mr. Huntley of the secret service," O'Malley explained. "Awful sorry that this should happen, Mr. Minot, but we got to search you."

"Search me! For what?" Minot cried. And in a flash he knew. Through that wild night he had not once thought of it. But it was still in his inside coat pocket, of course. Chain Lightning's collar!

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"That's what they all say," grunted Huntley. "Come here, my boy. Say, you're pretty wet. And shivering! Better have a warm bath and a drink. Turn around, please. Ah!"

With practiced fingers the detective explored rapidly Mr. Minot's person and pockets. The victim of the search stood limp, helpless. What could he do? There was no escape. It was all up now. For whatever reason they desired Chain Lightning's collar they could not fail to have it in another minute.

Side pockets—trousers pockets—now! The inner coat pocket! Its contents were in the detective's hand. Minot stared down. A little gasp escaped him.

The envelope that held Chain Lightning's collar was not among them! Two minutes longer Huntley pursued; then, with an oath of disappointment, he turned to O'Malley.

"Hasn't got it!" he announced.

Minot swept aside the profuse apologies of the hotel detective and somehow got out of the room. In a daze, he sought 389. He didn't have it—didn't have Chain Lightning's collar! Who did?

It was while he sat steaming in a hot bath that an idea came to him. The struggle on the deck of the Lilith, with Martin Wall panting at his side! The tug on his coat as they all went down together. The genial sprits of Wall thereafter. The sudden start for New York.

No question about it—Chain Lightning's collar was well out at sea now.

And yet why had Wall stopped to take the occupants of the launch aboard?

As completely at sea as he had been that night, when was more or less at sea, Minot returned to his room. It was after 3 o'clock. He turned out his lights and sought his bed.

The sun was bright outside his windows when he was aroused by a knock. "What is it?" he cried.

"A package for you, sir," said a bell-boy's voice.

He slipped one arm outside his door to receive it, a neat little bundle, securely tied, with his name written on the wrappings. Sleepily he undid the cord and took out an envelope.

He was no longer sleepy. He held the envelope open over his bed. Chain Lightning's collar tumbled, gleaming, upon the white sheet!

Also in the package was a note, which Minot read breathlessly:

Dear Mr. Minot:

I have decided not to go north after all, and am back in the harbor with the Lilith. As I expect Trimmer at any moment I have sent George over to Tarragona Island in charge of two sailormen for the day.

Cordially, MARTIN WALL.

P. S.—You dropped the inclosed in the scuffle on the boat last night.

At 10 o'clock that Saturday morning Lord Harrowby was engaged in the ceremony of breakfast in his rooms. For the occasion he wore an orange and purple dressing gown with a floral design no botanist could have sanctioned—the sort of dressing gown that Arnold Bennett, had he seen it, would have made a leading character in a novel. He was cheerful, was Harrowby, and as he glanced through an old copy of the London Times he made strange noises in his throat, under the impression that he was humming a musical comedy chorus.

There was a knock, and Harrowby cried, "Come in!" Mr. Minot, fresh as the morning and nowhere near so hot, entered.

"Feeling pretty satisfied with life, I'll wager," Minot suggested.

"My dear chap, gay as—as a robin," Harrowby replied.

"Snatch your last giggle," said Minot. "Have one final laugh and make it a good one. Then wake up."

"Wake up? Why, I am awake!"

"Oh, no; you're dreaming on a bed of roses. Listen! Martin Wall didn't

go north with the impostor after all. Changed his mind. Look!"



"For New York?" cried Minot.

And Minot tossed something on the table just about his lordship's eggs.

"The devil! Chain Lightning's collar!" cried Harrowby.

"Back to its original storage vault," said Minot. "What is this, Harrowby—a Drury Lane melodrama?"

"My word! I can't make it out."

"Can't you? Got the necklace back this morning with a note from Martin Wall saying I dropped it last night in the scuffle on the deck of the Lilith."

"Confound the thing!" sighed Harrowby, staring morosely at the diamonds.

"My first impulse," said Minot, "is to hand the necklace back to you and gracefully withdraw. But of course I'm here to look after Jephson's interests."

"Naturally," put in Harrowby quickly. "And let me tell you that should this necklace be found before the wedding Jephson is practically certain to pay that policy. I think you'd better keep it. They're not likely to search you again. If I took it, dear old chap, they search me every little while."

"You didn't steal this, did you?" Minot asked.

"Of course not," Harrowby flushed a delicate pink. "It belongs in our family—has for years. Everybody knows that."

"Well, what is the trouble?"

"I'll explain it all later. There's really nothing dishonorable as men of the world look at such things. I give you my word that you can serve Mr. Jephson best by keeping the necklace for the present and seeing to it that it does not fall into the hands of the men who are looking for it."

Minot sat staring gloomily ahead of him. Then he reached out, took up the necklace and restored it to his pocket.

"Oh, very well," he said. "If I'm sent to jail tell Thacker I went singing an epithalamium." He rose.

"By the way," Harrowby remarked. "I'm giving a little dinner tonight at the Manhattan club. May I count on you?"

"Surely," Minot smiled. "I'll be there wearing our necklace."

"My dear fellow—ah, I see you mean it pleasantly. Wear it by all means."

Minot passed from the eccentric blooms of that dressing gown to the more authentic flowers of the Flerk outdoors. In the plaza he met Cyril Meyrick, rival candidate for the

(To Be Continued)

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